

Biblical and Theological Foundations of Diversity

Diverse voci fanno dolci note.
Diverse voices make sweet music
-Dante Alighieri, *Commedia:Paradiso 6:124*

The motto of Westmont College—*Christus primatum tenens* (Christ holding preeminence)—signals our commitment to a vision of the universal sovereignty of Jesus Christ. We are bound to this vision because of our anchoring in the Scriptures, which present Christ as Lord over all creation.¹ Confession of Christ’s preeminence gives Westmont powerful reasons to welcome diversities of gender, ethnicity, class, and culture in its population and programs.²

Our dedication to diversity is grounded in the biblical promise that all the world will finally bow to the lordship of Christ³—since it is in Christ that “all things in heaven and on earth were created...and hold together,”⁴ and so through Christ that God will “reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven.”⁵ God’s plan for reconciliation is seen already in the Old Testament, which testifies to his calling of Abraham, so that through his seed—Christ in particular—“all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”⁶ These blessed are made up of not only the children of Israel, but persons from all nations adopted into the family of faith (for example, Rahab, Ruth, Naaman, the people of Nineveh, tax collectors, centurions, Samaritans, an Ethiopian eunuch, the merchant Lydia, and some who were disabled).⁷

The New Testament highlights Christ’s command to love God foremost and our neighbors as ourselves.⁸ Jesus proclaimed “good news to the poor” and “liberty to the captives,”⁹ and in him all are one: Jews and Greeks, slaves and free, males and females.¹⁰ The book of Revelation records a vision of Christ presiding over heaven and earth while the saints—described as “a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb”—together sing glory to God.¹¹

1. Colossians 1:15-20. All biblical citations and quotations come from the New Revised Standard Version

2. Westmont is a Christian educational institution; accordingly, its published statement on Community Life, including Behavioral Expectations, and its published Statement of Faith, including the Articles of Faith provide parameters as well as inspiration for the flourishing of diversity.

3. Philippians 2:9-11

4. Colossians: 1:16-17

5. Colossians: 1:20

6. Genesis 12:3; Galatians 3:16

7. Rahab:Joshua 6:15, Matthew 1:5, Hebrews 11:3; Ruth:Ruth 4:13-17, Matthew 1:5; Naaman:2 Kings 5; the people of Nineveh:Jonah 3:5-10; tax collectors: Mark 2:14-17, Luke 19:1-10; centurions: Matthew 8:1-10, Acts 10; Samaritans: John 4:1-42, Acts 8:5-25; Ethiopian eunuch: Acts 8:26-39; Lydia: Acts 16:14-15; some of the disabled: John 9, Acts 3:1-10. Compare Deuteronomy 23:7-8, Galatians 3:14

8. Mark 10:28-31

9. Luke 4:18; Isaiah 61:1

10. Galatians 3:28

11. Revelation 7:9

It is true that the unity of the created order is deeply disrupted by sin. Men and women, families, tribes, races, and nations have been set against one another, with differences among people often serving as a pretext for personal and systemic injustice.¹² Yet God has responded to sin not by abandoning his world but by providing for its redemption¹³. In consequence, God's people are called to repent of sin, grow in grace, acknowledge truth, seek justice, show mercy, practice forgiveness, and go and make disciples of all nations¹⁴—all because of Christ's atoning work, by which the power of sin has been broken.

12: Starting already in Genesis 3-4

13. I Peter 1:17-21

14. Mark 1:15; John 17:17; John 8:33; Matthew 23:23; Luke 10:37; Matthew 18:21-35; Matthew 28:19-20

Given the divine intention for creation, then, we see human diversity as a feature of life worth savoring, a feature approved and embraced by God. The unity of the kingdom, attested by Christian fellowship, gladly acknowledges the variety of personal backgrounds, histories, and contexts out of which love, thanksgiving, and worship are rendered to God. In the great harmony of creation's praise to God through Christ and the Holy Spirit, each inhabitant of the new heavens and new earth will participate with a distinctive voice. Anticipating this fulfillment, Christian relationships across differences are to be joyful rather than oppressive, loving rather than dismissive. Individuals must not be stigmatized for being different. Instead, diversity becomes a glorious property of the whole.

In summary, Westmont College is animated by a vision of God's reign. To be faithful to that vision we dedicate ourselves to the investigation and embodiment of diversity. Such dedication expresses our Christian identity, and rightly stewards God's gifts to us. It also provides a basis for excellence in scholarship and community life and anticipates the character of the world to come by signaling in our own time and place God's promised reconciliation of creation to himself. Hence our living-out of diversity bears witness to the redeeming work of Christ, and marks us with greater integrity as we proclaim his salvation.